



**Opening statement to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills regarding 'Continuous Assessment for State Examinations' (March 6th 2018)**

The TUI thanks the committee for this opportunity to address the issue of '**Continuous Assessment for State Examinations**'.

Assessment in schools tends to take three forms:

- Formative, which takes place in schools every day e.g. marking homework, copies etc
- Summative, which is used to measure the breadth and depth of knowledge acquired e.g. end of term examinations or State Examinations Commission examinations.
- Diagnostic testing which measures the capacity of a student to carry out tasks e.g. aptitude, psychological or special needs testing.

Each of these forms of assessment takes place frequently in schools. Formative assessment, by its nature, is continuous.

In relation to the State Examinations, it should be noted that additional forms of assessment (usually referred to as second component assessment) already take place in many subjects in the Leaving Certificate and are embedded in the revised Junior Cycle. For example, oral and practical tests already take place in many language and practical subjects. All recently revised Junior Cycle subject specifications include second component assessments (referred to as Assessment Tasks) which are assessed by the SEC. These are not, strictly speaking, continuous assessment as they take place to a national timetable. However, they do enable students to demonstrate wider abilities than could be shown by a written exam alone.

The suggestion is sometimes made that continuous assessment reduces student stress. However, the TUI believes that in some cases continuous assessment has simply led to students experiencing continuous stress with no break between assessments. Furthermore, it should be noted that an

excess of assessments can infringe on time to learn and explore topics of interest.

There are potentially significant risks arising from the use of continuous assessment in the State Examinations. These include:

- reputational risk to the existing, widely respected system overseen by the State Examinations Commission
- risks to student contact time and
- risks of 'over-assessment'.

It is worth noting that the Department for Education in England has recently moved away from continuous assessment for the purposes of lower secondary assessment (GCSE). This move was largely motivated by fears about a lack of 'rigour' in the assessments and also because continuous assessment can cause difficulties if students move school during an exam cycle. Continuous assessment as part of the State examinations can also cause difficulties for adult learners who may be pursuing their studies on a part-time basis.

It has sometimes been claimed that continuous assessment is 'easier' on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The TUI represents teachers and school leaders in a very high proportion of schools that are designated as disadvantaged. The TUI does not see any benefit deriving from a continuous assessment system that is not already available through existing systems of formative assessment and summative assessment (using second component measures as set out previously).

The suggestion that continuous assessment facilitates a new form of teaching that better prepares students for the 'modern world' is wide of the mark. Teaching methods are constantly evolving. Teachers already operate continuous assessment where it is appropriate to meet the needs of their students, especially in its most useful guise of formative assessment. Continuous assessment is a form of assessment and not a form of teaching and learning. The particular forms of assessment used do not change what a student learns, although they may modify the pace of that learning. The structure and content of courses/programmes designed by the NCCA typically take full account of the variety of assessment modes that are available and of the need to equip students for a world that is ever-changing.

The TUI asks the committee to note that any ill-advised implementation of continuous assessment

could undermine public trust in both the Junior Cycle/Certificate and the Leaving Certificate. This would have adverse implications for the approximately 120,000 students who sit those exams each year, with resultant implications for the further and higher education systems for several years to come. It would cause reputational damage to the Irish education system for an indeterminate period of time.

In conclusion, the TUI believes that movement to a system of continuous assessment system could negatively affect the quality and reputation of the Irish public education system. Significant, agreed changes are currently being implemented in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. The current system of curriculum and assessment development, under the auspices of the NCCA, is robust and reliable. It can and will make such changes as are required in a prudent manner that protects quality and reputation and that is focussed on the needs of students.